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February 11, 2005



Corzine: Give rape victims emergency birth control option

By The Associated Press

New Jersey and New York officials urged the Justice Department on Thursday to include in its guidelines for treating rape victims the option of receiving emergency contraception information, an issue supported by medical groups and victims' advocates but opposed by conservatives.

A representative from state Sen. Jon Corzine's office and a rape victims' advocate from New Jersey urged an advisory committee looking at ways to strengthen the national Violence Against Women Act to include the emergency contraception option.

"Of the 300,000 women who are sexually assaulted each year in this country, an estimated 25,000 will become pregnant," said Corzine, D-Summit, in remarks read to the committee in Washington. "The use of emergency contraception could significantly reduce this number of unintended pregnancies."

Justice Department officials have said the matter would be reviewed but have made no guarantees. The issue was not included in the agency's National Protocol for Sexual Assault Medical Forensic Examinations, released late last year.

In written remarks to the committee, Rep. Carolyn Maloney, D-Manhattan, said by not addressing the issue, the Justice Department "belies its disregard for women and their control over their sexual and reproductive health."

Maloney tried to speak to the committee but was turned away because she had not registered in time for the public comments period.

Deborah Shepherd, executive director of the New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault, said her group and others believe emergency contraception should be provided to rape victims instead of giving them a prescription.

Shepherd told the committee about a 16-year-old girl who had been raped and was given a prescription for emergency contraception, more commonly known as morning-after pills, but several pharmacies did not have the medication.

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